Sir Abdur Rahman of India cross examined Ben Gurion

8-Jul-47 – UNITED NATIONS SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON PALESTINE

Sir Abdur Rahman: Mr. Ben Gurion, do you wish to make any comments on the following declarations or statements on behalf of the British Government: 1. General Allenby' s declaration, soon after the Turks were defeated, to the effect that he "reminded the Emir Feisal that the Allies were in honour bound to endeavour to reach a settlement in accordance with the wishes of the "peoples concerned and urged him to place his trust wholeheartedly in their good faith"; 2. Commander Hogarth' s statement to King Hussein in January 1918 to the effect that the British Government were determined that insofar as it was compatible with the freedom of the existing population, both economic and political, no obstacle should be put in the way of the return of the Jews to Palestine; 3. Bassett' s letter dated 9 February 1918, to King Hussein, to the effect that His Majesty' s Government has hitherto made it their policy to ensure the Arab' s liberation and it remained the policy that they are determined unflinchingly to pursue by protecting such Arabs as already are liberated from all dangers and perils, and by assisting those who are still under the yoke of the tyrants to obtain their freedom; 4. the Anglo-French Declaration made on 7 November 1918 to the effect that the goal envisaged by France and Great Britain in prosecuting in the East the war was to secure the complete and final liberation of the people who have for so long been oppressed by the Turks and the setting up of national governments and administrations which should derive authority from the free exercise of the initiative and choice of the indigenous populations, and to further and assist in the setting up of indigenous Governments and administrations in Syria (from the Taurus range to the Egyptian frontier and Mesopotamia) which had already been liberated by the Allies, as well as in those territories which, they were endeavouring to liberate, and to recognize them as soon as they were actually set up?

Ben Gurion: No, sir.

Sir Abdur Rahman: Do you know anything about the Haycraft Commission which had been appointed to inquire into the Palestine disturbances of 1921?

Ben Gurion: Yes, sir.

Sir Abdur Rahman: Have you read their recommendations?

Ben Gurion: I believe I read them at the time.

Sir Abdur Rahman: Did the Arabs ever raise any objections to the Jews visiting Palestine or even to moderate immigration arising out of religious zeal before 1917?

Ben Gurion: Before that they had nothing to say in Palestine. It was the Turks.

Sir Abdur Rahman: Was Jewish immigration the cause of Arab riots and bloodshed in Palestine?

Ben Gurion: There was Jewish immigration, and there were riots. Maybe one was the cause of the other. It is a fact that there were both. Maybe there were other causes.

Sir Abdur Rahman: Could you give me any other cause?

Ben Gurion: Yes, a very serious cause was the Axis powers who sent money and instructors to arrange for a terrorist campaign against Jews. This was one of the causes.

Sir Abdur Rahman: When was this?

Ben Gurion: 1936, 1937, 1938, and 1939.

Sir Abdur Rahman: There were no riots before 1936?

Ben Gurion: There were.

Sir Abdur Rahman: What were they due to? What was the cause of them?

Ben Gurion: There were many causes. This was one of the causes. One cause, for instance, was that in 1929 there was a false accusation made against us by some people that we attacked the .Mosque of Omar, which was just as truthful as the accusation made against the Jews that they are drinking the blood of Christian children for ritual purposes. That was a very serious cause of disturbances in Damascus in 1940, where many Jews were murdered by the population for such an accusation. An accusation of that kind was made in 1929. This was the cause of serious riots when the entire Jewish community of Hebron, where there had been no immigration, was exterminated.

Sir Abdur Rahman: Was the extent of immigration between 1931-1939 in Palestine to the extent of 218,000 while, in the whole of the United States of America, Brazil, Australia and the Argentine, an area two hundred times larger than Palestine, the immigration was only to the extent of 207,000?

Ben Gurion: Those are facts, yes.

Sir Abdur Rahman: What do you know about the Jewish State of Birobidjan?

Ben Gurion: I have heard about it.

Sir Abdur Rahman: (India) : As a foreign State?

Ben Gurion: I think it is an autonomy, but I really cannot give exact details.

Sir Abdur Rahman: Have you had no chance to see this before?

Ben Gurion: I think there are a number of things which you have seen and which I have not. No, I have not seen this.

Sir Abdur Rahman: I am placing it before you. So you do not know whether it contains about thirty thousand square miles or only about one hundred thousand Jews?

Ben Gurion: I know that Soviet Russia is such a vast country that it may contain such a large area as you say, but really, I cannot tell you.

Sir Abdur Rahman: Do you know if it is really a State?

Ben Gurion: No, as far as I know it is not. It is an autonomy, and it is loyal to that autonomous condition. There is only a Jewish minority, as far as I know, but I do not know. I am not an expert on it, and I do not know why I must give this information.

Sir Abdur Rahman: I just wanted to know whether the official language of that place is Yiddish.

Ben Gurion: So far as I know it is not. I think this is the .only place in the world where the official language is Jewish.

Sir Abdur Rahman: Palestine is sacred to Christians, it is sacred to Moslems; therefore would you permit all the Moslems and all the Christians to come and settle down in Palestine on the same basis on which you want to settle down in Palestine?

Ben Gurion: There is a difference. Of course it is sacred to Christians. You are a Moslem and you say it is sacred to Moslems. I take your word for it.

Sir Abdur Rahman: You do not know about it?

Ben Gurion: Your authority is sufficient for that purpose. But Jews are coming to Palestine because it is our country, it has been our homeland for 3,500 years. In addition to that it is sacred to them because it is the centre of their religion. I know that Rome is sacred to Christians, and no Christian will ask the right to possess Rome. There is nothing like that here. We are here on the basis of the fact that it is the country of our people; we were dispossessed by force and we did not give it up. We are coming back to our home.

Sir Abdur Rahman: I will come to that part a little later. I just wanted to know because you know that the Moslems used to turn to the holy area of Masjid Aqsa as their Kaaba until the Prophet ordered faces to be turned towards Mecca at the time of prayer.

Ben Gurion: I am really afraid to contradict you, but the history which I know regarding Moslems is that at the beginning the Prophet of the Moslems called them to turn to Jerusalem and there were other things which he accepted in Jerusalem, but later on, when the Jews were living in Arabia, they refused to accept it, and many of them, especially Jews of the Medina died for it, because they refused to accept him as a prophet. He told his people to turn to Mecca, but so far as I know it has nothing to do with the reconstruction of Mecca.

Sir Abdur Rahman: That was the Kaaba in Mecca. . .

Ben Gurion: This is a discussion which does not concern me as it is a religious matter.

Sir Abdur Rahman: I just wanted to know. How many synagogues were there in Palestine before 1939?

Ben Gurion: I have not the information. Chairman: I repeat my request to the public to keep silent.

Sir Abdur Rahman: Did the President of the Tenth Zionist Congress, held in June 1931, make the following speech: "Only those suffering from gross ignorance or actuated by malice, could accuse us of the desire of establishing an independent Jewish kingdom. The people who allege this seem, so far as they are honest, to confuse Zionism with the Messianic belief. Our boundless love for Palestine owed its origin also to this belief, but it has never occurred to us modern practical Zionists to introduce Messianic tendencies into our movement."

Ben Gurion: Well, the President was here just now. I think you should have referred to him this question.

Sir Abdur Rahman: No, I did not know that Dr. Weizmann was actually presiding at that congress.

Ben Gurion: He was not the President of that congress. So far as I know, no such statement was made by the President who presided at the time.

Sir Abdur Rahman: Was it made by anyone else?

Ben Gurion: I do not know. You asked me if the President made such a statement. As far as I remember, the President at that congress made no such statement.

Sir Abdur Rahman: You cannot say whether anyone else made that statement? I am just trying to be clear in my mind about the question, but it may have been someone else.

Ben Gurion: All kinds of persons made all kinds of statements, and I really cannot be requested to remember everyone of them.

Sir Abdur Rahman: Apart from the Zionist' s attempts, have any other Jews made attempts to gain political sovereignty in Palestine? Have any other persons made any attempt to create a sovereign State in Palestine?

Ben Gurion: Yes, Jews throughout history before the Crusades, during the Crusades-all the Jews were exterminated in Palestine. After that, in the time of the Turks, they made these attempts by going back to Palestine and trying to build it up, because they believed that by building up they were r&establishing, as they called it in their language, a Jewish kingdom. We do not now use the word kingdom, but what they meant was a State. There was a time when a kind of chapter was written by one of the Turkish soldiers, a high official in Turkey, on the movement to build a part of Palestine as a Jewish province.

Sir Abdur Rahman: How far is the southernmost Jewish colony in the Negev from the Egyptian frontier?

Ben Gurion: I imagine it is some ten kilometres. I cannot give you the exact figure. I do not know, although I have travelled there. Perhaps twenty kilometres.

Sir Abdur Rahman: And are there any Jewish colonies near the Syrian frontier?

Ben Gurion: Yes, there are.

Sir Abdur Rahman: How many and how far? Just give me the figures.

Ben Gurion: There are many Jews on the frontier. There is one colony outside the frontier of Lebanon. There is a colony where the frontier is in the middle of the colony.

Sir Abdur Rahman: Was any picketing ordinance passed legalizing picketing by the Jews of Arab labour in 1940 or thereabouts?

Ben Gurion: No. there was picketing at many times, and there was a time when I had the privilege of taking part in it. Then Jews were excluded from work in Jewish colonies.

Sir Abdur Rahman: Was the picketing ordinance passed?

Ben Gurion: Yes, the picketing ordinance was passed.

Sir Abdur Rahman: Was it sometime in 1940 or thereabouts?

Ben Gurion: No, before that. To what ordinance do you refer?

Sir Abdur Rahman: The picketing ordinance.

Ben Gurion: No, not picketing, not in 1940. It was long before that.

Sir Abdur Rahman: Is it possible for you to imagine that any country in the world Canada, Australia, the United States of America, South Africa or England-will permit Jewish immigration in unlimited numbers if they are exposed to the risk of being outnumbered?

Ben Gurion: I do not feel any need to imagine such a thing. If you mean to ask why we want to come to Palestine, I have told you it is because we are coming back to our country. But I do not know why you want me to imagine such a thing could happen except in our country. Of course we do not imagine, we could not imagine, such a thing. On the contrary, I told you in my opening speech that we were offered space in another country, in Africa: we refused it on that account, because we did not consider it our country.

Sir Abdur Rahman: Do you imagine the friendship between the Jews and the Arabs will increase if unlimited immigration is permitted in Palestine?

Ben Gurion: I imagine that when the Jews are re-established as an independent nation they will establish good relations between themselves and their neighbours. Without it, no. There will be trouble with the Arabs who think they could do with the Jews what the Europeans did with them.

Sir Abdur Rahman: Have the relations between Arabs and Jews been very strained since the Mandate?

Ben Gurion: As I said, relations between individual Jews and individual Arabs were often very good in Turkish times, and they are very good now, but political relations between Arab communities and Jewish communities are not so good, and this is because they have been brought into opposition.

Sir Abdur Rahman: Who was in possession and occupation of Palestine as it is known today before the Israelites?

Ben Gurion: There were a large number of people who came here; there are many names. Chairman: Before whom?

Sir Abdur Rahman: Before the Israelites.

Ben Gurion: The names are supplied in our Bible.

Sir Abdur Rahman: All of them have died out?

Ben Gurion: Yes, all of them.

Sir Abdur Rahman: All of them and their descendants have died out?

Ben Gurion: Yes, they disappeared.

Sir Abdur Rahman: And the fellaheen who exist in Palestine today, are they descendants?

Ben Gurion: I do not think so.

Sir Abdur Rahman: Do you know that Abraham had two wives-at least, two wives with whom we are concerned-Hagar and Sarah. Sarah was the first and Hagar was the second. Ishmael was the son of Hagar; Isaac was the son of Sarah. Is that correct?

Ben Gurion: Yes.

Sir Abdur Rahman: Now it was predicted in the Bible-when I refer to the Bible I mean the Old Testament, I do not refer to the New Testament at all-it was predicted in the Old Testament that twelve tribes would spring from Israel.

Ben Gurion: No, it is not true. Chairman: Sir Abdur, will you please direct your questions this way?

Ben Gurion: It is said in the Bible, with, regard to these two children that to "Isaac and " the seed of Isaac I will give this land."

Sir Abdur Rahman: When did the Jews leave Palestine?

Ben Gurion: They never left it.

Sir Abdur Rahman: They have always been here?

Ben Gurion: Yes, except in the period of the Crusades, when all Jews were entirely exterminated.

Sir Abdur Rahman: When was that?

Ben Gurion: You know it was the 10, 11 and 12 centuries.

Sir Abdur Rahman: How many Jews did Titus deal very cruelly with the Jews?

Ben Gurion: You can rely on the historical documents which are there. I mean that he was cruel. He destroyed the Temple, expelled their leaders, put them to death in circuses in Rome, sold them as slaves.

Sir Abdur Rahman: And that also was first century A. D.?

Ben Gurion: Yes, but he did not expel all the Jews-130 years after that the Jews made war on the Romans, and 600,000 Jews, according to the Apostles, were killed by the Roman legions.

Sir Abdur Rahman: When was that?

Ben Gurion: That was 130 A. D.

Sir Abdur Rahman: Coming now to more mandate matters, can you give me an idea as to how much of the budget is being spent, I do not want the actual figure, if you will only refer me to the Administration Report I only wanted to have an idea from you how much in proportion to the whole income was being spent on public security?

Ben Gurion: I will refer you to report, and I refer you to our witnesses, Mr Eiorowitz and Mr. Bernstein. Chairman: We will reserve questions on the economic matters for the hearing of Mr. Horowitz and Mr. Berstein.

Sir Abdur Rahman: Now one thing more. I am giving you a list of the Arab villages which I am told were wiped out, and I ask you whether this is correct or not: Shatta, Afuleh, Jeidah, Tab' oon, Jinjar, Mejdel, Jisr al- Majme, Tel Adas, Jallood, Sasafeh, Tel EshShamaam, Al-Hartiya, Sheikh Breik, Hrief, Defna, Khan ed-Duer, Madekhel, Khayyan al-Walid, Cofarta, Jadra, Kirdana, etc. Have these Arab villages been erased? Do they exist now as Arab villages?

Ben Gurion: I am grateful to those who gave you this material, that you gave us the opportunity to speak about that. I want, not only yourself, but the whole Committee to know about it. One of our witnesses will tell you the whole story of it, and not merely in a way of "yes or no" as you require.

Sir Abdur Rahman: You give me the information later on.

Ben Gurion: You will get the information later on, and I am very grateful that you raised the question.

Sir Abdur Rahman: As statements were made by Jews that no Arabs had been displaced and by Arabs to the contrary, I wanted to verify it and to verify this.

Ben Gurion: It is your job to do that. Chairman: Will you please go on.

Sir Abdur Rahman: Now is it correct that, in spite of the restrictive measures, the Jews have been actually acquiring lands from the Arabs?

Ben Gurion: Yes, in a restrictive way. It is correct, for the last few years since 1939.

Sir Abdur Rahman: Will you kindly give me all the figures on the division of lands acquired in breach of the regulations?

Ben Gurion: I am sorry, we could not discuss them. It was not in breach of the regulations. It was in accordance with these regulations. You will get all these figures for all these years from 1939 until the present moment. It is a pity these regulations could not have been dropped; it was in accordance with the regulations. Chairman: Have you more questions on the political issue?

Sir Abdur Rahman: Yes. Do you think that politically there is room in this country both for the Arabs and unlimited number of Jews?

Ben Gurion: First of all, there is no such thing as unlimited number of Jews. There is a limited number of Jews.

Sir Abdur Rahman: Unlimited number of immigrants, then?

Ben Gurion: They are limited. I believe and I am convinced; it is not a matter of belief-that for the last 40 years I have done nothing but Study this problem because it is a matter of life and death for me and my people. I say it is a convention, and not merely a belief, that there is room in this country for every inhabitant in Palestine who is here already, whether Jew, Christian, Armenian, Arab, Moslem or any other, and several millions of Jews to come in. I am not able to fix the exact number, because this depends on a number of factors, mostly on the degree of development, and the degree of authority to have such a development.

Sir Abdur Rahman: I hope you remember my question. I am not talking economically, but politically.

Ben Gurion: Then I do not understand quite what you mean. You ask me about room; that is, whether there is room, and that is an economic question, but if you ask me about it politically, then it is no question at all. Politically, for instance, I can imagine a vast territory where not a single Jew can enter, although there are millions of square miles of land. They are two different questions, and politics has nothing to do with room.

Sir Abdur Rahman: As a matter of information, were exports of various commodities stopped from Palestine in 1920 or thereabouts? Chairman: Is not that also in the economic domain?

Sir Abdur Rahman: It was a question pertaining to economics, and I will leave it. I am leaving out all the economic questions. Chairman: Are there any more questions on the political issues?

Sir Abdur Rahman: No. Chairman: Then I think we shall have to adjourn and thank you very much.

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